RESTORATION REVIEW

Leroy Garrett, Editor

February, 1973 Volume 15, No. 2

fellowship

My brethren are not limited to the confines of one narrow partisan corral. I am sick of the whole hypocritical partisan approach and I never again, so help me God, to sell my soul to any group whose price for their love must be my hatred and hostility to other brethren. —*W. Carl Ketcherside*

If fellowship is to be genuine and deep, it must not be based, as in the ecumenical movement, simply upon faith "experienced"; it must be based upon faith which is "reflective," that is, faith which takes seriously the ground upon which faith and fellowship are based. —*Harold Hazelip*

Volume 15, No. 2 **Leroy Garrett, Editor** **February 1973**

FELLOWSHIP

W. Carl Ketcherside

My position on the fellowship we enjoy in Christ underwent a dramatic change when, in a foreign land, I traveled my personal "Damascus Road," and, taking Jesus at his word, opened the door of my inner self at his insistent knock and invited him in to commune with me. When the love of God was poured out in my heart by the Holy Spirit, and I knew that I had crossed the frontier from death unto life because I could love *all* of the brethren, I was forced to evaluate anew all that I had ever believed and taught. And today I praise his name for the wonderful deliverance from the sectarian spirit which he wrought in my unworthy life through his marvelous grace.

Prior to that time I was in the vanguard of one of the two dozen factions into which our once glorious restoration heritage had fragmented. I equated our party with the kingdom of heaven on earth, and regarded conformity with us as faithfulness to the Lord. All of you were "brothers in error," and categorized as either sectarians or hobbyists. In our arrogance we thought of ourselves as "the faithful church," and in our narrow and bitter exclusiveness we confused fellowship with partisan recognition and acceptance, to be withdrawn in pharisaic self-righteousness when one, in deference to his conscience, could no longer acquiesce in the theological molehills elevated to spiritual mountain status, and whose tongue could no longer pronounce our shibboleth.

When Jesus struck the sectarian shackles from my soul I came to see that the only brethren I have are "brethren in error." As Will Rogers put it, "We are all ignorant, but just about different things." All of us are caught up in the human predicament. None of us knows all there is to know. Every person among us is a sectarian to some and a hobbyist to others. There are no exceptions! A sectarian is one who has something we oppose, and a hobbyist is one who opposes something that we have. And yet no one is a liberal or conservative because of where he stands, but because of where we stand as we look at him.

I am ashamed of my previous littleness and bigotry. I have repented of it and claimed the forgiveness of the Father. I no longer think that I best serve him by fighting with his other children. I receive every child of God as God received me, in spite of my hangups, mistaken views and misunderstandings. So whatever may be your personal position on any of the so-called "issues" which have been hammered and pummeled into prominence, you are my brother. I love, welcome and receive you, whether you concur with my views or not. You are in the fellowship of the saints. Wherever my Father has a child there I have a brother or sister. And I regard none of you as half-brothers or stepbrothers. I have no "brothers-in-law" but only brothers in grace!

The word *koinonia*, commonly translated fellowship, is a term of majesty and magnitude. William Barclay asserts there is no single English word which can fully represent it. Literally, it means "the sharing of a common life," and the New English Version is to be commended for so rendering it. John declares that it is the sharing of eternal life, the life of God, made possible by the incarnation and manifestation of the Living Word, who came and brought his own tent with him, to share our nomadic life as foreigners and pilgrims.

When he besought the Father to give us the other Helper to abide with us through the age of his absence, fellowship became the sharing of the life of the indwelling Spirit. It is called "the fellowship of the Spirit" in Philippians 2:1 and in 2 Corinthians 13:14, where it is associated with the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God. All of these are divine gifts. Not one is a human achievement. The fellowship of the Spirit is not something men can extend or withdraw. It is a state or condition created by God which they can enjoy and in which they share through divine grace and marvelous love.

We are called into this fellowship of the Son, by God, who is faithful (1 Corinthians 1:9). The call is issued in the Good News, the factual Message concerning the Son, which makes it possible for us to share in his life of suffering here and in the glory of his life over there (2 Thess. 2:14). The proper response to the Good News introduces us to the fellowship of the Father and Son by the power of the indwelling Spirit. And that response is made by the belief of one fact and the obedience of one act. That fact is the noblest proposition ever affirmed in a universe defiled by sin, that Jesus is the Anointed One, the Son of God. The act, validating his lordship over the whole scope of surrendered existence is immersion in water. No other creed except Christ must be confessed, no other act than baptism must be performed, in order to be translated into the fellowship of the redeemed of all ages.

It is my conviction that every sincere believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, on the face of this earth, who is immersed upon the basis of his faith, is in the fellowship of which God's precious revelation speaks. I do not receive him into the fellowship. I receive him because he is in it. And I receive him as God received me, in spite of my ignorance, shortcomings and immaturity. Fellowship is not something to be negotiated or arrived at through argument, debate or conformity to orthodoxy. It is the gift of God through a love so powerful as to be almost incomprehensible to a weak mortal like myself.

The fellowship is the vitalizing principle of the one body, and that body is not composed of sects, splinters, or segments of believers. It is constituted of individuals joined to Jesus as head, and joined to one another only because they are joined to him. Fellowship is first vertical, and then horizontal. So our unity is not based upon conventional conformity but upon covenantal community. Every saved person on earth is in that body and in the fellowship. In our present state of schism and division, no faction or movement has all of God's sheep in its partisan corral. I am in the fellowship with saints of

God who never heard of Barton W. Stone or Thomas Campbell. Some of them have never heard of Alexander Campbell and the *Christian Baptist.* They have not even heard of W. Carl Ketcherside and *Mission Messenger.*

It is a stern indictment against us that we have confused fellowship with other things and have promoted division while proclaiming unity. Fellowship is not endorsement of the views, opinions, or interpretations of another. Fellowship is a transcendent relationship to provide community. Endorsement, on the other hand, is the sanction of, or assent to the ideas expressed by another. All of us endorse some views of those with whom we are not in the fellowship; all of us are in the fellowship with some whose views we do not endorse.

The brethren in Jerusalem did not all endorse Peter's conduct at the house of Cornelius, but it was precisely because they were in the fellowship that they questioned him (Acts 11:1-8).

Paul did not endorse the judgment or opinion of Barnabas in his desire to have John Mark accompany them, but it did not affect their fellowship (Acts 15:39).

Paul did not endorse the action of Simon Peter at Antioch but he did not sever him from the fellowship (Gal. 2:11), unless you have one of the apostles excluding another.

The scrupulous vegetarian did not endorse the act of eating meat but was forbidden to judge the one who did so, for God had received him (Romans 14:3). This shows that God receives men whose opinions, habits and actions others cannot endorse in good conscience.

The Bible teaches that individuals may live worthy of Christ and be saved even though in a congregation, the majority of whose members neither God nor themselves can endorse (Revelation 3:1-6).

Jesus said that a minority group will not be charged with endorsement of doctrine which they do not sanction or hold, even in a congregation which tolerates it and allows it to be taught (Revelation 2:18-29).

It is silly to equate fellowship with endorsement. Not one of us who has learned anything in the last twenty years, endorses all he believed that long ago. The ghost of fellowship present (to borrow a page from Charles Dickens) would need to withdraw from the ghost of fellowship past. We would be forced to exclude ourselves retroactively, for if we could be in the fellowship twenty years ago and hold our mistaken views, others can be in the fellowship today with the same views. If not, God is a respecter of persons. To argue that fellowship is contingent upon endorsement would mean that God could not be in fellowship with any of us, unless that which is perfect can endorse that which is not.

Again, fellowship is not conditioned upon harmony, but harmony is a goal, or fruit, of fellowship. We are in the fellowship not because we are in harmony, but because we are in the fellowship we strive to attain unto harmony. Not one injunction encouraging concord

as found in the apostolic letters was written to produce fellowship. Every such statement was addressed to those who were in the fellowship and because they were in it. A good example is found in Philippians 2:1, 2, where the apostle cites “the fellowship of the Spirit” as his ground for urging the saints to “fill up my cup of happiness by thinking and feeling alike, with the same love for one another, the same turn of mind, and a common care for unity.”

Certainly the congregation at Corinth lacked harmony. Paul postponed visiting them because he said, “I fear I may find quarreling and jealousy, angry tempers and personal rivalries, backbiting and gossip, arrogance and general disorder.” Still, he regarded them as called saints, in the fellowship of our Lord Jesus Christ. They were God’s building, God’s garden, God’s temple. They belonged to Christ. And it was because of this he urged, “Mend your ways; take our appeal to heart; agree with one another; live in peace; and the God of peace will be with you. Greet one another with the kiss of peace.”

But I am asked upon what grounds a congregation may dissociate itself from one who is recognized as a brother. There is no scriptural basis for one congregation excluding another congregation. No discipline can be exercised beyond the grounds of jurisdiction, without a gross usurpation of power and the exercise of tyranny. No coalition of congregations in an area can, through elected delegates or self-appointed representatives excommunicate another congregation. All such pressure groups are spawned by the spirit of Rome and not by the Spirit of Christ. If we proclaim congregational autonomy let us also practice it!

I hold that the scriptures teach that there are only three basic reasons for delivery of one unto Satan. All three have a common root. Since fellowship is established upon a covenantal commitment, only the renunciation or repudiation of that relationship can bring about a rupture of the fellowship. The common life is entered by an acceptance of the Lordship of Jesus over our earthly existence, and it can only be disrupted by a renunciation of our pledge of allegiance to him as our sovereign.

One may deny the Lordship of Jesus in two ways — by what he does, or by what he says. If he adopts a life-style or engages in a course of conduct in defiance of the moral and ethical values associated with Jesus, he ruthlessly violates the covenantal relationship. His behavior constitutes a public and blatant declaration that he will not allow Christ to reign over him. Thus, one ground for dissociation from a brother is moral turpitude, and this is discussed at length in 1 Cor. 5.

Another basis for congregational action is the advocacy of doctrines which separate from God. One may be mistaken about many things, but erroneous opinions will not necessarily sever him from God, else God would have no children left. The Father loves his children. He will no more cast them out because of faulty spiritual vision or inability than I would drive out a physically retarded child. And God has a lot of such children. The

body of truth is like the human body, in that it has many members. Not all of these are essential to being, some are essential only to wellbeing. All truths are equally true but not all truths are equally important.

What one must believe in order to enter into the fellowship of life is more important than what one may believe while in that life. Thus, a denial of the facts related to Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God will destroy the relationship created by acceptance of those facts. Such a denial separates from God exactly as such acceptance unites with God. If one is right about Jesus he can be wrong about a lot of things and still be saved. If he is wrong about Jesus, he can be right about everything else and still be lost. Fellowship is not conditioned upon being right about a given number of things, but upon being in the right One who was given for our sins.

The third basis for such actions as I am discussing is the factional spirit. This motivates one who is subverted and self-condemned to ignore all entreaty and admonition and to pursue a course of fragmentation of the body. To erect a “pro” or “con” party about any opinion or secondary matter, even if it is a truth, is a work of the flesh. It is a sign of deep-seated carnality and childish immaturity. Thus, the apostle says, “Avoid stupid controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels over the law, for they are unprofitable and futile. As for a man who is factious, after admonishing him once or twice, have nothing more to do with him”. No one ever started a faction until he enticed others to sympathize with and follow him. “It is these who set up divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit” (Jude 19).

These three destructive tendencies are the only tests of union or communion for the community of the reconciled ones. A consistent course of conduct which denies that Jesus is the source of life, advocacy of those doctrines which deny that Jesus is the foundation of life, and fragmentation of the body which expresses on earth that Jesus is the life — these constitute the sole scriptural reasons for a refusal to welcome, walk and work with our brethren.

No honest opinion arrived at from personal study of the sacred volume, and held in good conscience, can ever be made a test of fellowship without first becoming an unwritten creed. Regardless of whether one’s deductions may be right or wrong about cups or classes, music or the millennium, he must be received and retained, recognized and respected. No personal experience to which he testifies, whether we regard it as valid or invalid, can be made the excuse for driving one forth from under the umbrella of our congregational love.

It is at this point we reveal the tragedy growing out of our mistaken view of the glorious fellowship of the Spirit. Although we began historically as “a project to unite the Christians among the sects,” we are now one of the most schismatic religious movements on the contemporary American scene. We are divided over missionary societies,

instrumental music, centralized control, colleges, orphan homes, the support of national and international radio and television programs, the right to own television sets, leavened bread, unleavened bread, the manner of breaking the bread, fermented wine, individual cups, Bible classes, uninspired literature, the work of evangelists, the pastor system, marriage of divorced persons, speaking with tongues, divine healing, the charismatic renewal movement, foot-washing, the hour of meeting to eat the Lord's Supper, and a host of other things too numerous to mention, as they say in auction bills and posters.

Not once in all of God's word is division of God's children authorized as an approach to problems within the body. Every time division among the saints is mentioned it is condemned, and yet we could not be more divided if it were commanded of God. The fact is that we have had only one approach to differences when they arise — partisan debate, and only one solution where debate failed — division. Yet the first is discouraged and the second is condemned as contrary to the will of God.

And now, that we have splintered and fragmented ourselves until our very plea for unity makes a laughingstock of our radio broadcasts, we are told that we must thresh out every angle of every wrangle, and argue to a standstill every action of every faction, before we can ever have the satisfaction of a combined effort for our precious Lord. I deny that. And I have renounced partisan debate with any of my brethren as holding out any hope for a return to sanity of a movement madly tearing at its own flesh and consuming its own offspring.

I want to be clearly understood. I ask no one to see things as I see them. I solicit no one to work as I work. I shall love you as much if you disagree with me as if you agree. My love is not based upon your mental assent to my views but upon what Jesus did for us all. But I want to serve notice here and now that I reject our whole sectarian approach to the brotherhood of the ransomed and redeemed. My brethren are not limited to the confines of one narrow partisan corral. I am sick of the whole hypocritical partisan approach and I never intend again, so help me God, to sell my soul to any group whose price for their love must be my hatred and hostility to other brethren.

I have brethren who believe that Bible classes are wrong and other brethren who have educational wings which look like state office buildings. I have brethren who use only one container for the fruit of the vine and other brethren who use hundreds of little plastic glasses to serve the multitude. I have brethren who oppose Herald of Truth and never miss seeing it, and other brethren who support it and never look at it. I have brethren who would never allow an electric organ on the premises even for a wedding, and others who play on one every time they assemble to sing God's praise. But not a one of these has anything to do with the fellowship which is in Christ Jesus!

All of these I have mentioned are my brothers and I love them all. I do not agree with them upon everything they think, say or do. Certainly I cannot condone or endorse that with which I do not agree. But they are not answerable to me. They are answerable to the same Father who will also judge me. And I shall never again set at nought a brother for whom Christ died, over such matters. I will allow him to stand or fall to his own Master. I will not play God with the lives and thoughts of God's other children.

It is not easy to take the road of love for all of the brethren. It is the most difficult thing I ever sought to do. It makes you vulnerable, naked in spirit and open to attack. But I am committed to trudging this road into the sunset glow because it is the one which He asked me to walk. If it means crucifixion at the hands of those whom I love, the cross is not too great a price to pay for the crown.

What does this mean spelled out in terms of our practical problems of today? It means that the brethren who labor, teach and study at Abilene Christian College are my brethren. It also means that those who are associated with Florida College occupy the same spot in my heart. But it also means that the brethren at Cincinnati Bible Seminary and Ozark Bible College are just as much my brethren. I love them all. They are all God's children. They are all members of the royal family. I will go among them all, sharing with them my concepts as they will allow, and when they will not allow, then listening to them that I may learn and grow in knowledge as well as grace.

It means that Pat Boone is my brother and Shirley Boone is my sister. Whether the personal experience to which they testify is the work of the Spirit as they interpret it, or an emotional and psychological projection, as others interpret it, has not one thing to do with fellowship in Christ Jesus our Lord. I have all my life put up with people who had difficulty with English and I am not about to run someone off who says he can speak something else. My real trouble is not with brethren who claim to speak in tongues and don't know what they are saying. It is with those who claim to speak English and I don't know what they are saying!

The brethren who produce and propagandize the Herald of Truth programs are my brethren. The brethren who take to the air waves and support radio programs to attack their means of support are my brethren. The brethren who would not allow a television set on the place, and have to go over to a neighbor's place to watch the election returns, are my brethren. If I have to wait until everyone is consistent before I can have a brother, I will never have one, and if they all become consistent, they might exclude me.

So I propose to allow my brethren to go their way, blasting and bombarding one another as antis and liberals, but I will receive them all as long as they seek to cleave to Jesus as their prophet, priest and king. And I think all of them earnestly seek this. I no longer carry a pocket-full of labels and tags. And I have resolved never again to be boxed up in a neat factional package as a public display of loyalty. Pigeon-holing is for the birds!

Centuries before our Lord made this "the visited planet," God used the tongue of a herd man from Tekoa to thunder his wrath upon the people of Tyre because they "remembered not the brotherly covenant." Will the divine censure poured out upon a people who once united to erect an earthly temple, be less severe upon those who were incorporated as living stones in a spiritual temple, and who have trampled under their factional feet the covenant of brotherhood? Will we be forgiven if we take the keen sword handed us to vanquish a malevolent foe, and bathe it in the warm spiritual gore of God's other children?

I know not what course others may take, but I am resolved to ignore the cold and cruel fences and barriers our fathers erected to separate and segregate members of the divine family. I refuse to perpetuate the senseless feuds which originated in passion and have been kept inflamed by the tongues of bitterness and haughty pride. The dynamic of love has transformed into glowing transparency those walls which previously were opaque and I can now see my brethren on both sides of them. Praise God for such wonderful love — love which can melt hearts of stone — love which can span the frightful chasms eroded by hostility and bitterness.

Regardless of your personal feeling toward me, regardless of our divergent views, you are my brethren. All of you. We are in the fellowship of the divine. And I have been blessed above measure by a recognition of this wider, broader, and greater fellowship which makes possible soul-expansion in the pure atmosphere of the abundant life. I have learned the meaning of the poetic words:

He drew a circle and shut me out,
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout;
But love and I had the wit to win,

We drew a circle, and took him in. —139 Signal Hill Dr., St. Louis 63121

(Following the presentation of this paper, it was responded to by Harold Hazelip, Dean, Harding College Graduate School of Religion, Memphis, Tn., whose paper immediately follows this one. —*Ed*.)

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FELLOWSHIP: A RESPONSE

Harold Hazelip

"He drew a circle and shut me out,
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout;

But Love and I had the wit to win

We drew a circle and took him in."

Edwin B. Hayden, editor of the *Christian Standard,* tells of having used these words to encourage unity, and adds, "Then in response to what seemed excessively latitudinarian implications in the Edwin Markham verse, I added a quatrain of my own composing":

"There are circles large and circles small

To shut men out or include them all.

The making of circles goes on and on;

But what of the circle that God has drawn?" [1]

I have no quarrel with the breadth of spirit of Brother Ketcherside's paper. Certain negative responses which I shall make should not be interpreted either as lacking in appreciation for his attempts to bring "separated brethren" into dialogue with each other again, or as a defense of divisiveness. However, the Roman Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner, has spoken of a sense of "historical dizziness" which has emerged from intensive contact between differing religious groups. I believe we must endeavor to gain and keep our balance in the face of revolutionary movements which range from neopentecostalism to the "death of God," and which call for radical re-examination of convictions at every point.

Brother Ketcherside's paper seems to me to fall into four basic parts: an introductory testimonial; at attempt to define and de-limit fellowship, a delineation of three grounds for disruption of fellowship; and practical application of his principles as they relate to persons in this assembly. I shall comment briefly upon each of these four divisions and then offer a concluding statement.

THE INTRODUCTORY TESTIMONIAL

His introduction moves directly to a central problem related to our dividedness: Who is a "sectarian?" I question whether we can seriously define "sectarian" as "one who has something we oppose." We *must* seek a Biblical definition for this word. There is no question that we have experienced a great deal of "majoring on minors."

Is the proper corrective to this a "minoring on majors?" Shall we simply slide from an older concern about trivialities to a stance of no concern about essentials? Obviously, the real question is: What are the essentials? I believe any serious attempt to move brethren away from a high propensity for division over minutiae must grapple more seriously than his paper does with the criteria for constructing a list of essentials. I could not help wondering how he avoids being "sectarian" simply because his list of essentials differs from the list of other brethren.

Our application and counter-application to one another of New Testament passages on unity and heresy indicates that we have a basic problem in deciding what is heresy. Kittel makes a familiar distinction between *hairesis,* which affects the doctrinal foundation of the church and may even give rise to a new society alongside it, and *schisma*, which is a split within the community caused by personally motivated disputes. But the difficulty of deciding what is, in fact, heretical, is far too complex to dismiss lightly.

DEFINING FELLOWSHIP

When Humpty Dumpty said, "There's glory for you" and explained to a mystified Alice that he really meant "There's a nice knock-down argument for you," he went on to say, somewhat scornfully, "When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean, neither more nor less." What does *koinonia* really mean? Is it identical with *agape?* Or even with *adelphotes* (brotherhood)? Is it altogether a relationship, or state, or does it include "participation?" Brother Ketcherside defines it as "the sharing of a common life," and as a "state or condition created by God".

Professor Hauck (Kittel, *Theological Wordbook of the New Testament)* suggests three basic meanings for the koinonia words in the New Testament: "To share with someone in something," "to give someone a share in something," and "fellowship" as an abstract term which describes the "brotherly concord as established and expressed in the life of the community." Within the "to share with someone in something" meaning, he suggests seven expressions of fellowship in the New Testament: (1) Partnership in work or sharing in a nature (sometimes not a religious content —Lk. 5:10; Heb. 2:14); (2) In Paul — participation in Christ (1 Cor. 1:9), the Supper (1 Cor. 10:17), participation in the phases of the life of Christ (e. g. suffering, Ph. 3:10), partaking of the Spirit (2 Cor. 13:13), and having a share with Christians (2 Cor. 8:23); (3) In John — the living bond in which the Christian stands (with God, 1 John 1:3, 5; with Christians, 1 John 1:3, 7).

I am especially perplexed, in view of the richness of the word, by Brother Ketcherside's apparent implication that fellowship is a state or a somewhat static relationship rather than a vibrant joint-participation in activity as well as in a relationship.

And, how is fellowship created? I believe the one thing we need least at this point in our history is a new cliche. This "one fact — one act" creedal basis has an "intellectual assent plus legalistic response equals technical fellowship" ring which I believe is unbiblical. The problems it introduces range far beyond cups, classes, colleges, and accordions. Presumably, Eastern Orthodox believers, Seventh Day Adventists, and Mormons pass the "Lordship-Immersion" exam also.

The assertion that "every saved person on earth is in that body and in the fellowship," ignores the dynamic of this relationship. Man's response to Christ is (1) acceptance of Christ as Savior, and (2) submission to Christ as Lord. Trust is a continuing response

which is at the heart of this relationship. Fellowship for a "non-truster" is impossible — with either God or brethren. That he "once believed" that Jesus was Christ is not enough to maintain that relationship. Baptism marks the point at which the relationship began, but it does not assure that this relationship is presently operative.

Is fellowship to be equated with endorsement? There are usages of *koinonia* (e. g. Gal. 2:9) which do suggest endorsement (in this case, of a missionary strategy). Brother Ketcherside's scriptural examples of men who were not in complete agreement but who were in fellowship with each other are well-taken, albeit carefully chosen (e. g., they do not include 2 Tim. 2:1 7; "And their talk will eat its way like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus ") His examples, all taken from one viewpoint, overlook the fact that fellowship *must* sometimes cease. It is possible to *believe things* which cause one to *act in ways* which prevent other Christians from "sharing a common life" with him. Our difference at this point would appear to be not so much over the need to disassociate ourselves from one who is recognized as a brother, as over *which* beliefs and practices make such disassociation necessary.

GROUNDS FOR DISRUPTION

Three grounds for "delivery of one unto Satan," are given: moral turpitude, doctrinal aberration, and factionalism. These are traced to one basic root: renunciation of Jesus as Lord. These grounds are not in controversy; they might have been produced, for example, from a recent editorial page of the *Firm Foundation* (February 8, 1972). Our differences are not on principle but on how we *apply* principle. Is fellowship ever terminated with anyone without his peers believing he has been guilty of one of "these three destructive tendencies?"

Our problem obviously is that one may renounce the Lordship of Jesus and deny that he has done it, or fail to realize that he has done it, or be sincerely deluded into thinking he hasn't done it. Some call Jesus "Lord" without realizing that, in fact, they have never submitted to His will as Lord. This may be illustrated from the "moral turpitude" ground. The "new moralists" have reminded us that there is at least as much relativity involved in making moral decisions today as in reaching doctrinal decisions.

Two statements in this section of Brother Ketcherside's paper are especially interesting. One of these suggests a hierarchy of truths in the Christian faith: "All truths are equally true but not all truths are equally important." Vatican II's bishops advised Roman Catholic theologians who engage in ecumenical discussions, "When comparing doctrines, they should remember that in Catholic teaching there exists an order or "hierarchy" of truths, since they vary in their relationship to the foundation of the Christian faith."[2] *This may prove a helpful suggestion but we appear to face the same problem again: Which truths are unimportant? The Vatican decree indicates the central areas by calling on all*

Christians to "profess their faith in God, one and three, in the Incarnate Son of God, our Redeemer, and Lord," and in our "common hope." The difficulty to which I am alluding is suggested by brother Ketcherside's choice of words in the following sentence: "If one is right about Jesus he can be wrong about a lot of things and still be saved. If he is wrong about Jesus, he can be right *about every thing else* and still be lost." May we say, "If one is right about Jesus he can be wrong *about everything* else and still be saved?" Who decides which things are included in the "lot of things" we are allowed to be wrong about?

Another far-reaching statement in the same section is: "No honest opinion arrived at from personal study of the sacred volume, and held in good conscience, can ever be made a test of fellowship." I would suppose, for example, that Marcion, of the second century Roman church, would fit into this category, with his denial of the Old Testament and his separation of the God of the Old Testament from the God of the New Testament — but it hardly seems possible that someone with his ideas could be allowed free rein within a congregation. Or, on the contemporary scene, the doctrinal basis of the World Council of Churches would appear to be acceptable by this standard. The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches *which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God the Saviour* according to the Scriptures and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit."[3] *This "one fact" confession of Lordship could hardly be loftier. Is the "one act," immersion, the sole factor* dividing Christendom today?

HIS PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

The "practical applications" section of Brother Ketcherside's paper covers music, communion containers, tongue-speaking, cooperation, etc., with the suggestion that they all "fit together" and none of them affects fellowship. I am afraid that nothing is gained by concluding simply that our differences don't make any difference. Many of them probably don't. But our real task is not to dismiss heresy as trivial (assuming that heresy is possible at *some* point other than the deity of Christ) but rather to define what is and what is not, in fact, heretical. Where and what is tradition and Opinion, and where and what is Christian doctrine? This is the question and I believe the answer is much more difficult than Brother Ketcherside makes it.

Koinonia rests upon faith and faith rests upon the Word. Deviation from the Word, though it may seem nonessential, will ultimately strike at the heart of the gospel. This prompted Paul's warning, ". . . and their talk will eat its way like gangrene," (2 Tim. 2:17), and his quotation of Menander, "Bad company ruins good morals." (1 Cor. 15:33)

It is true that *we* cannot always tell with unerring certainty who is a Christian: "The Lord knows those who are his." (2 Tim. 2:19) But it is also true that we can admit that one has the right foundation and not approve his manner of building. (1 Cor. 3:11-15) The

decision as to when to give the "right-hand of fellowship" (Gal. 2:9), is not always simple. The consequences of a course of action may not be entirely predictable. The practice of open membership, for example, which is the acceptance of those into fellowship who have not been immersed into Christ, was introduced by the Disciples in many places, and the significance of baptism to them has apparently been destroyed. (Cf. Mission Messenger, September 1959, p. 5)

CONCLUSION

We can be grateful for conscience stirrings in the area of broken fellowship. We may not often have experienced New Testament fellowship, and consequently, do not miss it and are not too concerned to restore it. Just as it is unnatural for a normal child to insist upon playing alone, just as mountain climbers who scale dangerous heights are tied to each other for mutual support, so Christians are made for fellowship with others. Aristotle defined friendship as "one soul dwelling in two bodies." Christian fellowship brings a deeper bond than friendship. Bunyan has a few solitary characters on the highway — Honest, Valiant, Steadfast — but he soon brings them up with the main band. It was one of the great days in Christian's pilgrimage when he overtook Faithful. Their souls were immediately at one: "And I saw in my dreams that they went very lovingly together, and has sweet discourse of all things that had happened to them in their pilgrimage." Such fellowship is worthy of better efforts than we have given it.

However, if this fellowship is to be genuine and deep, it must not be based, as is the ecumenical movement, simply upon faith "experienced"; it must be based upon faith which is "reflective," that is, faith which takes seriously the ground upon which faith and fellowship are based. Animosities' can and should be reduced immediately and some areas of cooperation between brethren who are conscientiously separated from one another may be possible. But the kind of joint participation suggested by the "right hand of fellowship" of Galatians 2:9 will not be achieved by any easy answer. This is true because we are not dealing with the merger of the New York Central and Pennsylvania Railroads; we are seeking a spiritual union and communion between conscientious brethren who have too long been separated from one another by greater and lesser issues — all of which are "greater" to the man who holds them. *—1000 Cherry Road, Memphis, Tn. 38117*

1 *Communion Quester,* III (1967), p.25.

2 Walter M. Abbott, *The Documents of Vatican II,* pp. 354.

3 Harold E. Fey, ed., *A History of the Ecumenical Movement,* Vol. II, 1948-1968, p. 35.

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HAVE THE SPIRITUAL (MIRACULOUS?) GIFTS CEASED?

Recently I was asked to respond to an essay prepared by Prof. Frank Pack, chairman of the religion department, Pepperdine University, on the cessation of the miraculous gifts. This article is not that response, but it does grow out of the study that I devoted to the subject, and it consequently reaches some of the conclusions set forth in the response. It does more in that it states my own personal viewpoint, which is not usually the purpose of a paper designed primarily to evaluate the thesis of someone else.

The manner of entitling this article has some significance, for "the spiritual gifts" are usually equated with *miraculous* gifts, an assumption that I must question at the outset. Or if not question, I must ask for a definition of *miraculous*. If we follow Webster and say that a miracle is that which "apparently contradicts known scientific laws and is hence thought to be due to supernatural causes," then much of one's life in God is shrouded in miracle. Whether the experience is baptism, the Lord's Supper, prayer, or a life of trust, it reaches beyond scientific law and touches the supernatural. Indeed, the supernatural is what religion is all about.

If we follow Rudolf Bultmann and insist that a miracle is not only something that "falls outside the frame of the usual course of things in nature and history and thus becomes a problem for human reflection," but is also *an observable event*, then we have a different starting point. If Bultmann is right, then God might send a thousand angels to rescue you from an impending disaster without working a miracle. No one would see the angels and you yourself might be unaware of God's act in your behalf, and while this would be supernatural it would not be miraculous in that it was not observable by man. And so Bultmann distinguishes between providence and miracle.

And Bultmann might well be right. If so, a miracle is not for the purpose of ministering to God's people as much as it is for witness and confirmation to the world. God might well care for His children, ministering to all their needs in His gracious providence, without ever performing "an observable event." So a miracle is a sign or wonder, something seen by men to cause them to marvel.

When this view of miracle is applied to the lists of spiritual gifts in the scriptures, one cannot be so sure as to which are miraculous and which are merely providential. Tongues would surely be miraculous, especially if they are publicly demonstrated. But what of one who quietly uses the gift in his own devotions, without anyone else even knowing of it? This would hardly be a *wonder*.

The gift of healing might well amaze observers, especially if the healing is sudden, such as one taking up his pallet and walking. And so we would have a miracle. But might not one have the gift of healing in a different form, in that his prayers so impress God that

a slower process of healing is set in motion, and so a man with incurable cancer is made well after a few weeks. This would not be an observable wonder, or at least not as much so, in that what happened could be accounted for on other than supernatural grounds. And yet it was God's act, through a believer with the gift of healing.

Take a gift like *prophecy*, which is listed with the nine "miraculous gifts" of 1 Cor. 12. It is also among the gifts (*charismata*, same word as in 1 Cor. 12) of Rom. 12:6, which are generally recognized as *not* miraculous, for here are such plain Jane gifts as teaching, exhorting, giving, leadership, and acts of mercy. How can prophecy be miraculous in 1 Cor. 12 and not miraculous in Rom. 12? So with the gift of teaching (which must be different from *prophecy* in that both appear in the same lists), which is listed in both the so-called "miraculous gifts" of 1 Cor. 12 and the nonmiraculous of Rom. 12.

I conclude, therefore, that it is just as well to drop the term *miracle* in reference to the gifts under discussion. The scriptures simply describe them as spiritual gifts, *charismata*, to be distinguished from *doma* (gift), such as in Eph. 4:11. The idea of *charismata* is that the Spirit gives one the ability to serve in some particular way in building up the Body. It is not a residual gift, but a functioning one. Its source is the Spirit; its purpose is ministry; its power is the dynamic of God within the person.

So let us forget the idea of "miracle" in reference to these gifts. They are simply the work of God in men's lives, whether observable by the world or not. Our folk have a way of going bananas when they hear the term *miracle*. You can talk about *providence*. You can say "God be with you" or "The Lord's will be done" and even "May God overrule," but never *Expect a miracle!* God may move heaven and hell in being with us, in doing His will, and in overruling, all of which is all right so long as He stays out of the business of performing miracles — *today*, that is!

All agree that these gifts were present and enjoyed some prominence in the life of the early church. The question is whether they in the meantime have ceased and are therefore not applicable to believers today.

My position is that there is no proof in the scriptures that these gifts ceased or that it was intended that they cease, short of the consummation of all things in end-time. This does not obligate me to say that the gifts are consequently present in any particular age of the church, now or in past generations. One might even argue that for some reason God has brought these special gifts to an end. I am only saying that one cannot take the Bible and *prove* the cessation of the gifts. He can theorize. He can draw deductions from history. But when he is through he will be short of proof. The Bible simply does not teach that the gifts were given to the church, only to be taken from it at sometime in the future.

The passage that has become a proof text for this claim among *our* people is 1 Cor. 13:8-10: "As for prophecy, it will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away."

I say *our* people because this is only a Church of Christ prooftext. One will be hard put to find even one recognized scholar who will interpret verse 10 to be a reference to the completion of scriptural revelation, which would mean that when God's revelation to man is consummated through the completion of the Bible that the special gifts will then cease.

Why this view has no scholarly support is plain enough. Is is a deduction rather than an induction. If one assumes the gifts have ceased and is in search of a prooftext, this will satisfy him. But if he draws no conclusion from this text but what the context allows, which is the inductive method, he will reach a conclusion similar to the consensus of scholarship. I believe in what Alexander Campbell called *consensus fidelium*, which is the faithful conclusion of the majority of dedicated minds to a common problem. And he insisted that everything he was working for in the reformation of the church, whether immersion or the nature of the church, was supported by the *consensus fidelium*.

I also agree with Reuel Lemmons, who, in an editorial in the *Firm Foundation* wrote: "Every doctrine, whatever it may be, of every church in the world, that is peculiar to itself cannot be in the Bible."

Then we should drop this novel interpretation of 1 Cor. 13, and argue from some other basis the cessation of the gifts, if indeed we must so argue.

A careful reading of the verses in question will make it clear that the apostle is talking about knowledge. In verse 9 he says "our knowledge is imperfect," then in verse 10 he says, "When the perfect comes," that is perfect knowledge or understanding, "that which is in part," that is, partial or imperfect understanding, "will be done away." He goes on to compare this with a child's grasp of things over against an adult's understanding. He further likens it to looking at a reflection in a mirror (or polished metal), which is but a hazy grasp of reality, over against "face to face" understanding which he will some day realize. "Now I know in part," he adds, "but then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood."

The then — the time of "face to face" comprehension — clearly refers to a time beyond our present limitations, whether first or twentieth century. This obvious truth has led James MacKnight to render the passage, "When the perfect gift of complete illumination is bestowed on all in heaven, then that which is partial, namely the present gifts of knowledge and prophecy, shall be abolished as useless."

It is surprising that our folk could ever take this passage and come up with the idea that when the church had received all of the scriptures through the apostles, then the gifts referred to would cease. One can have all the Bible and even have it committed to

memory, and still not "know fully even as I am fully known." The apostle is not talking about the capacity to know fully (assuming now that the Bible has in it all that God wants us to know for eternity) or the potential for such understanding. When "the perfect" comes we shall know fully. Who dares to say that he knows fully? But I can see this as a promise of God for all believers in end-time, whether they know the Bible well or not.

So, where are we? That the Bible does not prove the gifts have ceased. Neither can one prove they have not ceased. Some take a try at history, but if anything history only substantiates what we already have in scripture: that these gifts prevailed among a minority of believers all through the centuries. No less an authority than Hans Lietzmann finds evidence of the spiritual gifts all through the history of the church. This is corroborated by the likes of Harnack and Mosheim.

So if scripture does not dispose of the gifts, history does less so. This means that we should leave the question open and be as wise as old Gamaliel, who has long been admired for his wisdom: "If this understanding is of men, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might be found opposing God!"

This does not satisfy a lot of my brothers, who are about as eager to rip the gifts away from all those who make such claims as are some of those who have the gifts to impose them on all others. I like the way Pat Boone puts it: "Seek the Giver, not the gifts." But these brothers will not accept Pat, no matter how he says it.

With such ones it is a losing game to try to persuade them to a more moderate position, for they assume that all those who "claim" to speak in tongues have some hangup that demands such phenomenon. So, if one begins to speak in tongues, they say, "That was to be expected, his problems being what they are." Of those who want all God's gifts, but who do not speak in tongues, they say, "Of course not. They're normal." So, if you start speaking in tongues, you are then and there adjudged as abnormal all along.

The trouble with this kind of evaluation is that it simply will not hold-up in the light of the facts. Some of the best oriented minds among us, the ones most unlikely to come up with a subjective experience, are some of the ones who speak in tongues. I know people in sound health, happily married, financially secure, blessed with happy children, gainfully employed — people who would need some strange, subjective experience about like they would need a hole in the head — who are speaking in tongues. And yet I know folk who I supposed would surely join the "fad" and come up rolling and barking as well as speaking in tongues, being as erratic and as unpredictable as they are, who do not speak in tongues, even though they are infatuated with the notion.

I probably qualify as well as anyone as a voice of moderation between these extremes. One brother in California writes me that if I were not so "intellectual" I would receive the gifts available to me. Others have long since predicted that I would be speaking in tongues being the "sentimentalist" that I am.

The truth is that in my own personal life the gift of tongues is a non-issue. I don't even think about it. I have along the way referred to such in praying to the Father, assuring him that I want Jesus enthroned as Lord in my life, and for Him to give me whatever blessings that will more deeply sanctify Christ in my heart. If that calls for tongues, glory be! But I do not conclude, since God has not given me such a gift, that such a gift is not for *anyone* in the church today.

Paul spoke in tongues, though Jesus probably did not (even though he had the Spirit more than any human being ever). Some in the Corinthian congregation spoke in tongues and a few here and there in other places. Paul blesses tongues as a gift, even saying that he would have all to so speak, and yet he does not emphasize it as a supreme spiritual experience. This he gives to the dynamic of love, while tongues remains a subordinate experience, both in the number it touches and in quality. But still it was of God. It was genuine and useful.

Recently I have heard several tapes by Oral Roberts on tongues, sent to me by a dear sister who realizes my need for education along these lines. Oral impresses me with his fair manner of handling the question. Free of dogmatism, he weighs each reference carefully, leaving the impression that he has nothing to lose in searching for truth. When he comes to Acts 2, he takes the time to read the entire chapter slowly and carefully.

His conclusion, or one of them, surprised me, and I find myself in agreement. Tongues are valid for *some* people today, yes, but it is a private experience between a man and God. Accept the gift of tongues, count it a blessing for yourself, but don't try to impose it upon others.

But neither should non-tongue speakers impose their non-speaking upon others. The rule of love works both ways.

And let us have a broader view of the gifts, for they include charity and acts of mercy as well as tongues; and there is service and administration as well as healing. Teaching, wisdom, knowledge, and discerning of spirits are all part of the *charismata*. Surely all of us are "charismatic" in one way or another, and they all stand or fall together. It seems amiss that these gifts, given to enhance Body ministry, should have no relevance to our time. It is one thing to say that the special "signs of an apostle" given to the Christ's ambassadors are not relevant to all either then or now, and another thing to say that these gifts, the purpose of which was service to believers, have no place in our lives. —*the Editor*

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OFFICE NOTES

Many of our readers drop by to see us in Denton from time to time, and we extend an invitation to all of you to do just that, so long as you don't all come at the same time. It is well to call in advance in the event you are driving out of your way, for I am often away from home. One item of interest to visitors is often back issues of *Restoration Review.* We have some 90 back issues, ranging back to 1959, neatly arranged on our shelves. These are loose copies that sell for only 20 cents each or 6 for 1.00. You don't have to come see us to pick these up. Send us 3.00 and we will send you 18 back numbers, selected at random back through the years, and then you can fill in as you may have interest. But some issues are now out-of-print.

But we can provide you with 5 bound volumes at only 3.00 each. These will later go up in price, so you should order now if you are interested. These begin with the 1966 volume and go through 1970. The 1971-72 double volume will be issued this spring, and you should send us your order it you have not. You will be billed when the book is sent.

If you are interested in learning more about one of the neglected disciple pioneers, we recommend *Walter Scott Speaks* by John W. Neth, which is only 2.00. And for a handy and readable history of our Movement we urge upon you *Christians Only* by James DeForest Murch at 3.50.

A number of our readers have profited from *Why Christians Crack Up,* written by a believing physician. One chapter is on spiritual causes of nervous tension. 3.95

One of my old teachers at ACC who is now in his last years at Florida College is author of a new book, *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets*, which is a reasonable and responsible piece of work. Homer Hailey has long reveled in the glory of the prophets, and his love for them shines through his work. One indication that this is not a "Church of Christ commentary" is that the author does not use Amos 3:3 ("How can two walk together except they be agreed") as a prooftext that brothers must see alike in order to be in the fellowship. He says the "two" are the Lord and the prophet, which simply means that Amos would not be prophesying if the Lord had not sent him. The book is a substantial volume in hardback and is well worth the high price of 6.95.

Ouida and I recommend to all parents a delightful and informative book that we can sell better than we can practice. *Dare to Discipline* is now in paperback for only 1.95. It is a volume of urgent advice to parents and teachers, written by a believing psychiatrist. The short chapter on "A Moment for Mom" has five suggestions that could well change a Mother's life. A long chapter on "Discipline in the Classroom" could transform our schools if taken seriously. The chapter on "Miracle Tools" and another on "Discipline Gone to Pot" are most helpful.

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OUR CHANGING WORLD

It is gratifying to see so much peacemaking going on in the non-class Churches of Christ. Some of these brethren are taking the lead in showing us what the apostle meant when he said that it is love that unites everything in perfect harmony. A recent expression of this was evident at the Rochelle Road Church of Christ in Irving, in the heart of the Dallas-Ft. Worth complex, in the form of a unity forum. Some 25 leaders from several persuasions of Churches of Christ accepted Rochelle Road's invitation to a one-day sharing bee, the theme of the meeting being "What values should we be stressing in the church today?"

Half of the morning was given over to mutual sharing, with each one present taking a few minutes to tell of his own pilgrimage with the Lord. It was remarkable how much talk there was of grace, trust, the gospel, and Jesus. It was obviously a gathering of a new breed of leadership among us, men sickened by sectarianism and determined to lay hold on "the gospel of the grace of God." In listening to such testimonials I was reminded of that line of scripture — "and when they had seen the grace of God."

This was followed by presentations by Leon Fancher of Mena, Arkansas and Foy Richey of Plano, Texas. In speaking to the theme, Leon observed that the church's greatest task today is to elevate Jesus, finding new meaning in the promise "He that hath the Son hath life." He also pointed to the power of prayer, the Spirit-filled life, and the meaning of worship as values to be pursued.

Foy is a hospital chaplain as well as a minister to Westview church in Plano, near Dallas, so we were not surprised to hear him stress the healing and service values. What he called "life and death issues" include racism, drug addiction, war, abortion. He spoke of the Christian experience as "the celebration of life." He thinks the church needs to be more concerned with *fruits* and less with *roots.*

With Larry Brannum, minister to Rochelle Road, chairing the proceedings, we had what everyone agreed to be a delightful experience, made all the better by a luncheon together.

To say that we need hundreds of such gatherings at the grassroots level is to put it mildly. It is imperative that we get with it and get acquainted for Jesus' sake, and be the brothers and sisters that he intends us to be. But what thrilled me was that all this was inspired by a non-class congregation, the very ones that we have supposed to be too sectarian to have such interests. It all shows that with all that the Lord is doing with all of us it is a new ball game.

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The much larger gathering at the ACC Preachers' Workshop is really something to write about, but the ground rules of that particular gathering are such that we cannot tell of it in the same way. President Stevens did reveal that he and J. D. Thomas might have postponed the affair had they a way to inform all of us, the weather being so inclement. It was so bad, being the worst ice storm in west Texas in two generations, that they thought hardly anyone would show. But 600 or more showed, ice or no ice! There would have been twice that with more favorable circumstances. Those who came were rewarded, for the presentations were of high quality and the spirit that prevailed was the finest ever. The Abilene brethren are to be commended for allowing open and free discussion of vital issues. If we are a free people, we cannot afford to do otherwise.

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Some 900 churchmen met recently in Houston to discuss the future of the church, the spokesmen of which generally agreed that the church of the present and the future will find its power in the fellowship of small groups. Modern denominations are now irrelevant, they concluded, and the church of tomorrow must turn to the nurture of individuals rather than the preservation of systems. Tom Skinner, the black chaplain for the Washington Redskins, spoke of the need of a Savior for losers. We've had testimonials as to what Jesus does for the movie star or the successful business man, but what does the church have to say to a bankrupt person or one in a wheelchair. The church must make love to God, which is the meaning of worship, he said, but this can hardly be done in a congregation of thousands.

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Address all mail to: 1201 Windsor Dr., Denton, TX 76201*

RESTORATION REVIEW is published monthly, except July and August, at 1201 Windsor Dr., Denton, Texas, on a second class permit.

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